

A method for operating a video game with backfeeding a video image of a player, and a video game arranged for practising the method.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The invention relates to a method for operating a video game, said method comprising the steps of:

- enabling a player to interact with a gaming environment,
- 5 machine-detecting a score and/or performance of the player in a particular session,

backfeeding into the gaming environment a representation of said score and/or performance in visual form through an item that identifies the player in question.

- A method of this kind is known from GB 2,205,188. Generally, the game may be an arcade game, a PC-based game that gets its software on a local CD-ROM player, or a network-based game that operates off-line and get its software through downloading. Various other configurations of such gaming environment are feasible. In a network environment, the game may be conducted off-line with a single player, off-line with multiple players, or even on-line with multiple players. The realization of the environment may be as conventional as a fruit
- 10 machine, or high tech through using virtual reality features.
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- Various people have seen the advantage of rewarding players in video games with the presentation of their identity. The above reference uses a printed ticket for outputting the name of a player alone or in combination with an attained score. The present invention has recognized that present day technology can attain a much higher degree of
- 20 liveliness, especially in view of falling prices of various devices. In particular, video aspects of such a gaming environment have been experienced as being interesting to user persons.

SUMMARY TO THE INVENTION

- Amongst other things, it is therefore an object to present the player with a
- 25 lifelike or video image of him or herself. Accordingly, the invention is characterized by automatically taking up a video image of the player in question as said representation for subsequent video display in said gaming environment. Compared with the remaining elements of the gaming environment that often comprise a great amount of electromechanical hardware, the price of a camera has fallen dramatically. Furthermore, confrontation of a

09022132-02498
86T20-2ET2060

player with an other person's image being displayed in the actual gaming environment, has been felt as extremely tantalizing. The nature of the image may be a photograph or even a dynamic clip of the player.

Advantageously, the invention comprises a ranking step among players in
5 respectively successive playing sessions, and displaying images of high-ranking players in a relatively persistent manner with respect to subsequent playing sessions. In this manner, competition among various players is raised still further. Top players could have a display that is persistent over a relatively long period, such as one day or even one week.

Advantageously, for use in a multiple player environment, the video
10 image is selectively and cross-wise fed back to said multiple players. This enhances the competitive character of such a game still further: for example in a car-racing environment all players could have the face of the leading driver on their display during further racing.

Advantageously, the video image is made part of a composite image
15 together with selective items taken from memory. Such item could relate to a characteristic attire worn in the real-life counterpart of the game, such as a space suit, or a particular interesting person related or not to the gaming environment in question, such as President Clinton or movie star Debi Moore.

Advantageously, the player person is allowed to suppress during the
session a presentation of said actual score and/or performance to said backfeeding
20 mechanism. This allows a person to remain anonymous if required; the realization can be effected through answering a system question by a keyboard command.

The invention also relates to a video game arranged for practising the
above method. Further advantageous aspects of the invention are recited in dependent
Claims.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

These and other aspects and advantages of the invention will be discussed
more in detail with reference to the disclosure of preferred embodiments hereinafter, and in
particular with reference to the Figures wherein:

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Figure 1 is a block diagram of a multi-player environment;

Figure 2 is an instantaneous representation of a game image together with
a player image.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

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Figure 1 is a block diagram of a multi-player environment. At left is the setup for the first player person. Here, item 22 symbolizes the user interface. As shown, it is a multikey-keyboard. However, various other such interfaces have become known, such as a joystick, a steering wheel, an electronic pinball interface as recited in US Application Serial
5 No. 08/823,577 (PHN 15.755) to the present assignee. In particular, the interface may be bidirectional. The signals from the user interface are sent to the local processing device 24. This local processing device generates an image on display 20. Furthermore, it sends a control signal to local camera arrangement 26 that is focused through lens 28 on the local player, or at least on a position where this player is supposed to be. The camera is attached
10 for sending the image information to local processing device 24. Now, in a stand-alone setup the processing device 24 calculates the score of the player. This score may represent the number of hits in a shooting game, the number of points and/or jackpot hits in a pinball machine environment, or other scores as applicable. In certain circumstances such as the gaining of a particular number of points, processing device 24 may transmit a command to
15 camera 26 so that an image of the player is taken up through appropriate focus and direction of lens 28. The image signals are digitized and transferred to central processing device 24 for more or less persistent storage in local memory that has not been shown separately. If the player would object against taking this image, at the beginning of the gaming session an appropriate command must be given upon a machine-generated question.

20 In a subsequent gaming session, the image so taken up can be displayed on display 20, for example, at the start of the session, or rather, during the evolution of the game as specified in the gaming rules. In case a plurality of pictures have been taken up during successive gaming sessions the processing device 24 through some kind of ranking mechanism may give preference to the image of a particular player in favour of other
25 images. The ranking mechanism may be permanent, for example in that always the top player of the last week has his image displayed. Other ranking strategies could introduce some random character in that the selection is made among a plurality of images.

At right in the Figure a similar setup is shown with corresponding items 30, 32, 34, 36 and 38. First, this second game could also represent a stand-alone
30 environment. Alternatively, competition between two simultaneous players could be introduced in that the two processing devices 24 and 34 are joined through some interconnection mechanism 40. The latter could be a local network, an interconnection to the Internet system or any appropriate item. Now, the two gaming sessions can be joined to each other, for example, in a racing duel. For example, the camera could take up the images of

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the driver that actually leads the pack, for display on all displays 20, 30. An alternative is that the images may actually figure in the game in that they actually become part of the game. For example, in a boxing game, the highest ranking player of a recent past could be superposed to the image of the actual player's opponent.

5 Figure 2 is an actual image of a racing game. The display device 60 has been shown with the actual image screen 62 in its centre. The image first contains the dashboard 64 of the driver (=player) in question. In front of the actual car the road 66 to be taken has been shown. Far out in front can be seen the car 68 of the driver that leads the pack. In the upper part of the screen, that may have a different aspect ratio from the one
10 shown here, various game parameters are displayed. First, field 70 shows the lag of the driver in question behind the leading driver, second field 72 shows an image of the face of the driver who is actually in front, and field 74 shows the driver that has covered the overall racing circuit in the shortest time. If the present player himself is actually leading the pack, either the field for the image of the leading driver is empty, or the image of the actual driver
15 is displayed.

At the end of the session, the image of the victorious driver may be printed, together with a textual identifier such as name or initials, and further relevant data, such as actual score, calendar date, names of other players and their respective scores, etcetera. A particular feature is to join the image of the victorious driver with another image,
20 or even a clip taken from memory. By itself, the joining of images into a single picture is known technology, that is made easier and more natural if the camera through good focusing creates an image that has a well-defined circumference, so that a particular "hole" may be filled with an image taken from memory. The printing may be on paper or similar material, or even on a CD-ROM rewritable, if the game program had been provided on such support.
25 The printing may be effected remotely, such as on only one of the networked terminals of Figure 1. If applicable, the display may be in the form of a short movie fragment or so-called clip.